

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results and interpretations of Phase I and Phase II archeological investigations of the yard area surrounding the Murphy House (N-544; 7NC-841) in New Castle County, Delaware. The site, originally identified as the George Murphy House (Taylor et al. 1989), is being referred to in this report as the Murphy House; while George Murphy appears to have built the house, it was his father, William, who actually inhabited it during the main period of ownership by the Murphy family. The archeological investigations were necessitated by the proposed dualization of Route 141 (Centre Road) from Route 100 (Montchanin Road) to U.S. Route 202 (Concord Pike). Funding for the project was provided by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the work was carried out for the Location and Environmental Studies Office, Division of Highways, Department of Transportation, State of Delaware (DelDOT) by the Thunderbird Archeological Associates, Inc. (TAA), of Woodstock, Virginia. This project was conducted in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, and Section 138 of the Federal Highway Act.

The Murphy House had been the subject of a previous study (Taylor et al. 1989) in which archival investigations were conducted in order to document the ownership history. Permission could not be obtained at that time to conduct the field investigations due to the poor health of the tenant.

Deed references and census records indicated that the tract was once part of a larger early nineteenth century farm. George Murphy began purchasing tracts of the land in 1841, built a stone house and a frame barn at some point before 1849, and completed his land acquisition in 1850; his Rockland Road property totaled close to fifteen acres at that point. In 1851, his father, William Murphy, purchased the property lived there until his death in 1870. George Murphy inherited the house from his father and, from that time on, the property was occupied by a series of tenants, both during the ownership of George Murphy as well as during the ownership of subsequent owners--Henry DuPont, William DuPont, and Alfred DuPont. The Murphy property was sold to Henry DuPont in 1882, passed to his son William in 1889, and was sold to Alfred I. Dupont in 1916, ultimately becoming part of the Nemours estate.

The house represents one of the few remaining well-preserved nineteenth century structures in the proposed Route 141 corridor. From an archeological perspective, the property was felt to offer an opportunity to seek data that might allow an examination of changes in land use and occupancy (i.e. from owner occupancy to tenancy) from the mid

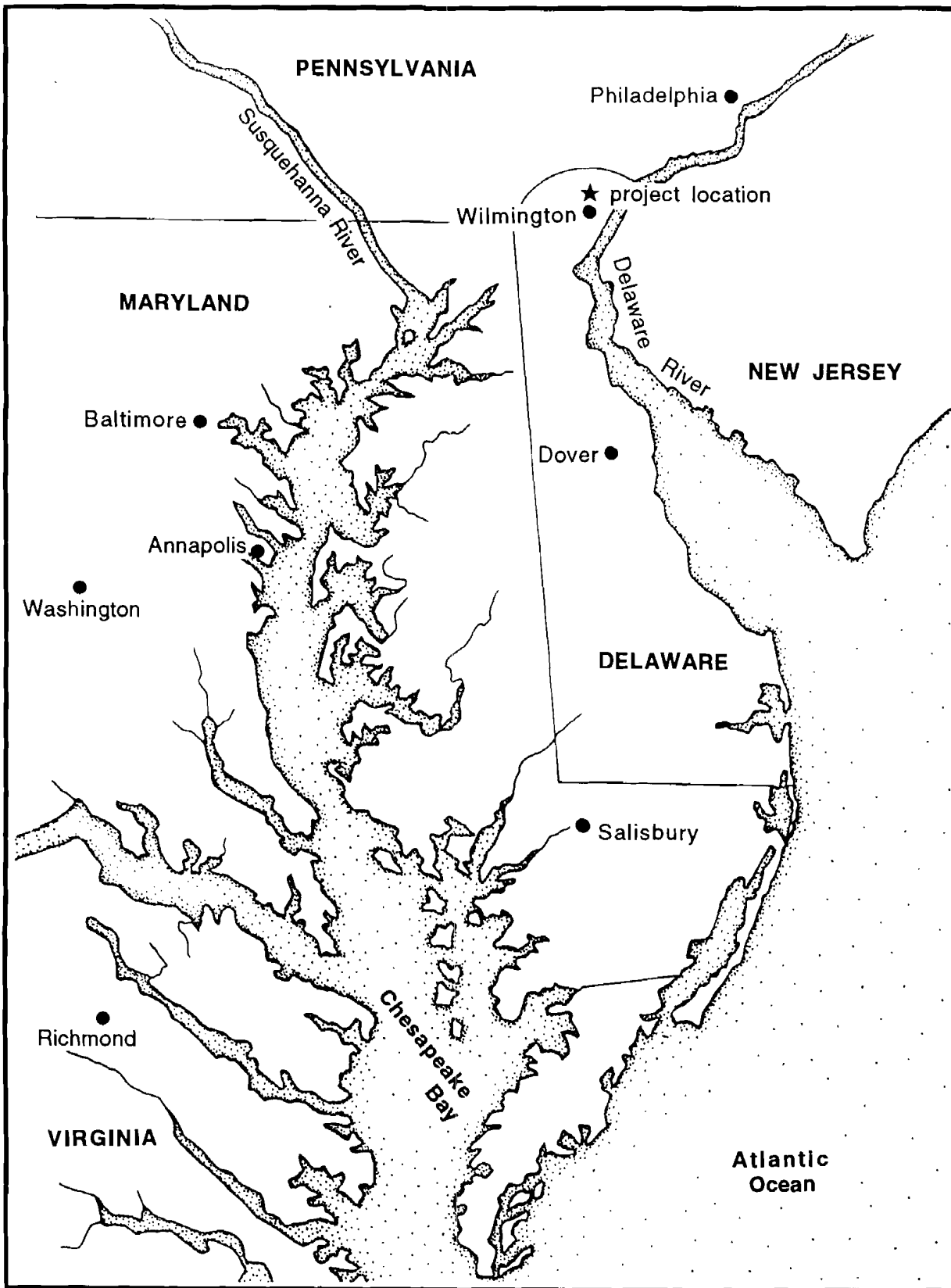


FIGURE 1
Regional map showing project location

nineteenth century to the present. Evidence for middens, privies, outbuildings, and other related features that one might expect to find around a typical nineteenth and early twentieth century farm and homestead was expected to be encountered during the subsurface testing.

The Phase I investigations, conducted in January and March of 1993, were designed to determine if intact archeological contexts were present and, if so, to determine their size, function, and chronological placement. The investigation resulted in the identification of an partially articulated stone foundation of unknown function and temporal placement.

The Phase II archeological investigations, carried out in April of 1993, were directed towards a determination of the potential National Register eligibility of the resources revealed during the Phase I. There was the possibility that the Phase II testing might reveal the presence of additional features which may have been associated with this foundation.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING AND PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION

The study area is located in New Castle County (Figure 1), falling within the Piedmont Uplands physiographic province just north of the Fall Line which marks the transition from the Piedmont to the Coastal Plain. The following summary of the environmental setting has been abstracted from Custer (1984).

The Piedmont Uplands of Delaware represent the northern portion of the Delmarva Peninsula and are characterized by a generally high relief topography cut by narrow and sometimes steep stream valleys of relatively small drainage systems, with isolated knolls rising above the general level of the landscape. Thornbury (1965) notes that, within the Piedmont Uplands, there are no large tributaries of the older incised river systems of the Susquehanna and the Delaware rivers, but that drainage systems tend to be of lower order. While some larger floodplains can be found along the higher order streams of White Clay Creek and the Brandywine, Elk and Northeast Rivers, those in this portion of the region tend to be rather limited in size. Elevations in the general study area range from 100 feet to 325 feet above sea level. The underlying geologic formations are folded Paleozoic and Pre-Cambrian metamorphic and igneous rocks. Soils are generally well-drained, although there are some poorly-drained areas in floodplains and upland flats.

The study area encompasses one and a quarter acres of level land bordered by Old Murphy Road on the west and Rockland Road on the south, to the front of the house (Figure 2). East of the property, the ground slopes slightly and adjoins a modern building complex containing medical offices associated with the Alfred I. DuPont Institute. To the north, the property gradually narrows to a wooded strip of land which borders Old Murphy Road. To the west of the property, across Old Murphy Road, there is an open field and a wooded area. South of the Murphy House, across Rockland Road, is the Alfred I. DuPont